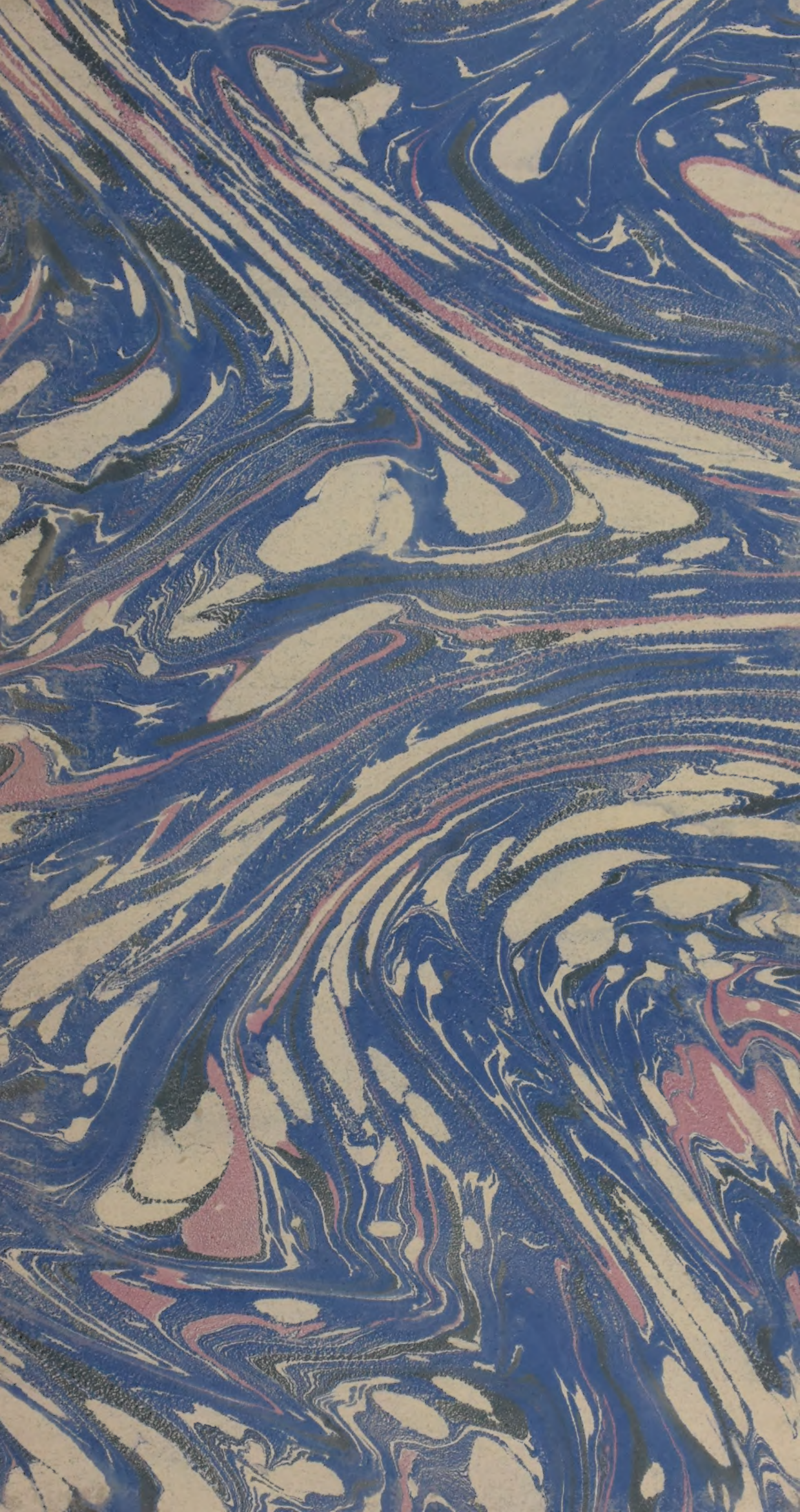

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

TO THE COURSE OF THE

PRACTICE OF MEDICINE,

DELIVERED IN

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE,

OCTOBER 16th, 1849.

BY

J. K. MITCHELL, M.D.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

Jefferson Medical College, October 24th, 1849.

Professor J. K. Mitchell:

Dear Sir,—It is with the greatest pleasure that we, a committee appointed by the Class, fulfil their instructions in respectfully soliciting for publication a copy of your Introductory, delivered on the 16th of October.

Yours, very respectfully,

C. Dorsey Baer, Md., President.
W. S. Cochran, Penn., Secretary.
J. G. Brooks, Maine.
Levi W. Tuttle, N. H.
A. D. Smith, Vt.
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A. E. Sharp, Iowa.
E. W. Barr, Ill.
A. J. Davis, Mich.
J. Da Costa, Germany.
Lavington Quick, England.

Philadelphia, November 6th, 1849.

My Young Friends,—With pleasure I comply with your request of a copy for publication, of my last Introductory, which I have now the honour to send you.

With great regard for the class which you so well represent, and with sentiments of esteem for yourselves,

I am, with respect,

Yours, faithfully,

J. K. MITCHELL.

To Messrs. C. Dorsey Baer, President,
W. S. Cochran, Secretary,
J. G. Brooks, and others,
Committee of the Jefferson Class.

INTRODUCTORY.

THIS is a most interesting meeting. Here are assembled, at the outset of their business life, the sons of excellent people, who are scattered over almost the whole civilized universe. Towards Philadelphia, at this moment, are directed the thoughts and the hearts of a distant and diffused population. Fathers, aware of the temptations and snares of a great metropolis, and not ignorant of the inexperience and incaution of the young, tremble for the character and the health of their sons. Mothers, proud of the worth, and confident of the steadiness of their children, have no fears of that kind; but they do fear that they may not meet with the kindness and comforts of home; they dread the elaborate study, the toil of the lamp, the injured constitution; and, above all, they fear that sickness may come, without the consolations of a mother's tender care, or of a sister's soothing companionship. But these thoughts often vanish before the bright hope of a son's return; who is to come back laden with the honours of his noble profession, enriched with the knowledge of the great world, and polished by the friction of a larger association. The mother never doubts that her son will win the highest prize of learning, and fly to her arms wiser and better than even her maternal fondness had painted him at parting.

Thus, then, centre here the hopes and fears of an interesting population. Hundreds, nay, thousands of the most virtuous and intelligent people are eagerly awaiting the account which you will give them of this first meeting. These letters of love will be read all over the Union, with an interest which dims, by comparison, the zeal of the politician, or the fervour of the sectarian. I may well say, therefore, that this is an interesting meeting for those whom you love.

You are here, gentlemen, for a most important purpose.

You are about to study, under the most favourable circumstances, the art of assuaging pain, and prolonging life. The ministration of the loftiest professional duty is here sought by you. In honour, in accomplishments, in varied usefulness, the profession of medicine is pre-eminent in this country, and you are here to become its successful pupils. I may well, therefore, say that this is a meeting interesting to the country.

Upon your success in that for which we now meet, depends your chance of independence, and reputation and happiness. Almost boundless opportunity for knowledge is now within your reach. The portals through which you are now passing, lead to the temple of truth, beyond which lie the bright fields of honourable enterprise, and its rich reward, independence and distinction. To you, therefore, this is a most interesting meeting.

My eminent colleagues and myself look with pride and pleasure upon this first meeting with so large and so respectable an audience. In each succeeding year, the appearance and the solid value of our class has, in its gradual improvement, announced the onward progress of the great Union, in manners, education, and refinement. Whilst this has gratified our patriotism, it has flattered our self-love; and I say, therefore, with no common exultation, that this meeting, to-night, is to us most interesting.

The city of Philadelphia has ever been the great centre of American art and science. Without meaning to detract from the great merits and eminent desert of sister cities, I fear no contradiction, when I say, that, from the time of Rittenhouse, and Franklin, and Godfrey, and Fulton, and Fitch, and Oliver Evans, and Shippen, and Wistar, and Rush, and Physick, to the brilliant constellation of learning and science which now graces the city of Penn, Philadelphia has ever been a leader in that which most adorns the man, and most ennobles the country. It is the sense of that which, from every part of this broad continent, concentrates here, the brilliant audience by which I am now surrounded.

It is a most expressive homage to the mighty past, as well as a flattering compliment to the brilliant present. To this honour, done to Philadelphia, may be added the substantial commercial value of the presence of so many strangers, who, in a great variety of modes, contribute to the wealth and happiness of Philadelphia. The vast sum spent here annually by students of medicine, is swollen in amount, by the contributions which the physicians who have been students periodically transmit, for books, instruments, and medicines. A judicious friend, who excels in statistical inquiries, thinks that thus, directly and indirectly, the schools of medicine add annually to the income of this city *a million of dollars*. That is the interest of a capital of nearly seventeen millions of dollars. Well, therefore, may Philadelphia feel that this is a most interesting meeting.

At a sitting of the Academy of Natural Sciences, on last Tuesday evening, to hear an interesting memoir upon entophytes, by the indefatigable and skilful Dr. Leidy, there arose a necessity to call the roll of the members who were present. I was astonished, though gratified, to perceive that, in that unprofessional scientific association, nearly the entire number consisted of men of the medical profession, many of whom are very eminent in their vocation. Thus is it, all over the country. Science leans upon the shoulder of medicine; and if medicine waited for her own illustration, until science grew to maturity, well does she now repay the debt by lending nearly all her children to aid science in her beneficent progression. You are here, therefore, gentlemen, not only to study medicine, but to imbibe a taste for the arts, a love of learning, and a desire to throw the plummet of inquiry into the deep sea of knowledge. You are not here to learn a mere trade. You are assembled to become not artists only, but philosophers—not physicians only, but sages. You will doubtless learn the art of healing, and the science of diagnosis; but you will do much more. You will, as your illustrious medical predecessors have done, carry the light of various philosophy to the utmost boundaries of

the country, and kindle in every village the fire of natural truth. Abstract from us what has been done for science by physicians, and our country would lapse into the category of semi-barbarous nations. Well, therefore, may I say, that, for the cause of learning, this is an interesting meeting.

Meeting here, from all parts of the country, the sons of the most influential people sit for a long session, side by side. Each brings to this great centre, from the very periphery of the Union, his virtues and his faults, personal and sectional. Thus is afforded an opportunity of comparison and correction. Many a cherished prejudice is thus discovered and removed; many a peculiar excellence is thus detected and extended. Uniformity in sentiment, language, and manners, thus acquired, spreads like a fragrant oil over the angry waters of peculiar antipathies, and the smooth surface of a generous nationality reflects more justly the smile of approving Heaven. The student who goes hence northward, carries with him the friendship of some who are departing towards the sunny South, or the far-spreading West. A friendly correspondence of language and sentiment cements the union of the individuals, whilst it enforces the union of the States.

The change which time and chance thus work out in you, gentlemen, is of priceless value to the remote or nearer districts to which you will finally return. I have once before likened this enrichment, and its communication to the wide surface of the country, to that of the circulation of the blood. You come to this vast lung of science to inhale the purest atmosphere of a divine philosophy, and thus, brightened and vivified like the blood, you carry everywhere the *pabulum vitæ* to make beautiful and strong the remotest member of our grand confederacy. I do not here insist so much on what you learn from us, as what you derive from each other. The smaller, perhaps, your number, the larger might be the medical gain of each of you, but the larger your number, the greater will be the benefit derived from communicated excellencies, and corrected errors. The pro-

fession may possibly be less enriched, but the country more, and, therefore, is it, that, as an American and a philanthropist, I would exclaim, surely this is an interesting meeting.

But, gentlemen, after a time, which, to the most studious of you, will appear very, *very* short, to the idle, very, *very* long, your meetings here, however variously interesting, will cease; and you will, under extraordinary transformation, return to your homes, or diffuse yourselves over not only the country, but the earth. It is hardly a temerity to assert, that you will be found wherever the flag of the country flutters to the breeze, or the white sail of commerce imprints the mirror of the remotest ocean. It is hardly rash to say, that every corner of our grand empire will resound to the hoof of your courser, or furrow itself beneath the swift wheel of your diligent carriage. How the thought makes me tremble! What! shall the words, the lessons, here given, brighten or darken, as they are good or evil, the vast, the almost boundless surface of this magnificent commonwealth? The *verbum emissum, quod nunquam revertitur*, the irreclaimable language of the college-desk, flies off—off—off—to become the nutritious grain, or the rank and poisonous weed, of city purlieu, village common, or forest-field.

My heart almost sinks within me, as I dwell on this idea; which shows the magnitude of our task, and the responsibility of our position. Each succeeding year, as the reputation of the school, and the size of the class, increase together, that responsibility weighs more heavily upon us. A wider, and a still wider ocean, undulates, as the pebbles of knowledge are cast upon its surface.

As grows the school, so grows also the learning of the profession, which it is our duty to acquire.—As mind becomes less fettered by the chains of a mere authority, and thought, untrammelled, revels in the richness of inexhaustible discovery, the difficulty increases of keeping near to the wheels of the chariot of truth. Hippocrates and

Aristotle ruled alone for a thousand years, during which time philosophy and medicine had but one hand-book. The library of a physician could not only be read, but carefully studied, in one year. Now, to merely read what is annually written, would demand all the eyes of Argus, and, to remember it, all the memory of a Maia. The sense of these responsibilities and difficulties renders the meeting to night one most painfully interesting to us.

Our interest in you makes us cast our eyes beyond the present, to that future, which will, I fondly hope, see you comfortably established in a good home, and a lucrative business. The addresses introductory are usually made to you as students. They contain advice and admonition for your present use. I shall avoid that beaten path to-night, and rather explore for you the way of duty, after you have completed your scholastic studies, received your merited honours, and retired from the seat of the acquirement of knowledge, to the field of its application.

I shall suppose, gentlemen, without the fear of giving offence, I hope, even to one of you, that you are *doctores omnes*—all, graduates. Nay, more, that you have reached home, received the congratulations of your friends and relatives, placed your name upon a proper corner, arranged your medicines, marshalled your books and instruments, and set up for yourselves. That is a very interesting period of your lives. Hitherto you have had guardians, of some degree of authority, to regulate your actions, and to control your conduct. In the sweet home, from which you now come, fresh from the gushing fountain of a mother's love, the sleepless watchfulness of a father's thoughtful care, your every want was anticipated; and, in the advance of the march of growing temptations, sagacity and affection warned you of danger, and stood by your side to fight your battles. You are no longer within ear-shot of these monitions and defences; but, even here, the unslumbering guardianship reveals itself, in the countless messages, tenderly expressed, that spread their snowy wings, at every point of the com-

pass, to concentrate, in Philadelphia, the glorious aggregation of a sublime and tireless affection.

But, even here, gentlemen, you are not far from advice and protection. *In loco parentum*, as far as is possible, stand your professors, ever ready to add to your security, and to insure your triumphs, not only in the moral, but in the intellectual field of enterprise. In all trials, therefore, under every temptation, in front of every difficulty, fly to us, as friends and auxiliaries, and believe that we cannot forget how much you risk, how much you sacrifice, to place yourselves, afar from home, under our especial guardianship. Should we then, actuated by a deep sense of this part of our responsibility, sometimes assume an attitude of authority, you will believe that, while we feel this to be a debt to those by whom you are consigned to our care, we shall never forget, either in expression or conduct, our respect for you as gentlemen, or our regard for you as friends.

But after a very brief period, you will be, most of you, separated from the immediate care of your relatives: and the guardianship of your teachers, and you will be intrusted with that dangerous heritage, the exclusive administration of your own affairs, social and medical.

Rarely does the pressure of immediate business occupy all your time. There is a pause here, in your hitherto active life; and you have leisure to look about you,—first at the country, next at its population.

The geological condition of your new abode, is of the greatest importance to its hygienic relations. The mountain and plain, the *alluvium* and the primitive surface, affect in several modes the salubrity of a district. One of your earliest objects, therefore, should be to ascertain the character of the surface of the country, the nature of its rocks, the dip of its strata, the temperature of its springs, the rate of the currents of its streams, the proportion of stagnant water, and the general character of its peculiar minerals. This knowledge, after the lessons to be given by the able professor of chemistry, you can, with a manual in your

hands, upon which alone to depend, master, at least to the necessary degree, in a few months, without encroachment upon either your business or your pleasure. Without it, a rural physician cannot take or give a philosophical view of the medical condition of his place of residence. He never can add a satisfactory element to the stock of human knowledge.

Having acquired a competent geological knowledge of your district, your next care should be to learn the relation of the prevalent diseases, to its geology. In making such a survey, you will very soon perceive that, not only different varieties of the same diseases have special residences, but that essentially different diseases are localized in different parts of your neighbourhood. You may perhaps find that whilst variously diversified abdominal affections are spread over the very old surfaces, as upon the hills and ridges, as highly modified febrile disorders are distributed over the rich alluvium, or cluster around the points of most recent irrigation.

Studying thus, in a very limited district, the relations of surface to sickness, you may help to unlock the curious secret of morbid causation, which yet lies buried in the most profound obscurity. Amidst the quiet of a country life, where all the surface, and all the events, lie immediately before you, you are able to seize upon that totality, which, in a city, cannot be grasped. Here we see but a part of a grand whole. Everything is artificial, everything is obscure, and if we get at useful knowledge, the proofs are incomplete and imperfect. A city physician sees a case here and a case there,—another doctor's practice interlocks with his, and another and another, so that to see the whole ground to which I now refer, would demand the impossible: a perfect and frequent reunion of the whole vast faculty. Even then, the problem is too great and too complex for our limited powers, and we are in constant danger of taking too partial and imperfect views of truth, even when we are able to collect all the knowledge of all physicians. The narrower

therefore, the sphere, the better the view of truth, provided that we make simple and natural observations upon that which lies before us. So far then the position of a rural physician is advantageous to discovery, and that of which he may complain, the very limitation of his sphere of vision, is of inestimable value to him, if he will only strive to master its little totality. As I have ever advised the writer of an inaugural thesis to select a very limited subject, so as to be able, in the usual compass, to take a full view of the matter in hand, I would congratulate a rural practitioner upon having his district entirely within his scope and vision. In the totality of his knowledge lies its value. A city physician may see more, much more, but the country physician sees it much better. I have ever therefore valued most highly the memoirs of rural practitioners, when they have laid aside the fancies of the age, and have given to us plain, simple narratives of their observations. Unfortunately most village writers think it necessary to mix up opinions with phenomena, in such a manner as to obscure the truth, and thus deprive us of the incalculable advantages of their position. What medicine now most wants, are such phenomena, as could be recorded only by rural physicians. What rural writers hardly ever do, is to give us the naked truth. Instead of starting with the facts, they usually start with opinions, and their effort is rather to sustain old notions, than to put them into the peril of a simple statement of things as they are. I verily believe that if we could persuade our country friends, that their observations are of the greatest value, when they contain the very least quantity possible of self, we should do a signal service to the cause of truth, and wonderfully promote the progress of medical science.

In no sense is this country a new one so much as in its *flora*. Scarcely an indigenous plant is exactly like that of other countries. We may therefore expect to find, among the flowers and weeds of our America, many possessed of very valuable properties; yet, up to this time, scarcely a

vegetable article of *materia medica* has established for itself a fixed place on the shelf of the practitioner. In the old world, where for ages accident or skill has been adding to the *armamentum medicum*, there are almost countless vegetable medicines. Should this be so? Mexico contributes but her jalap, and Peru her cinchona, although far behind us in science and art: whilst the unimportant articles spigelia Marylandica, and datura stramonium, are almost the only peculiarity which we have as yet announced from our quarter of the continent. True it is, that in domestic practice, and even among physicians, we sometimes hear of the *juglans cinerea*, the *eupatorium perfoliatum*, and the *cimicifuga serpentaria*. But they are far from being in common use, and are known abroad only to a few of the more curious inquirers. In this department of our art, much remains to be done by rural practitioners, who, by listening to the extra-professional statements of the virtues of popular remedies, may yet make most important discoveries. It was thus that Jenner detected the protective virtue of vaccinia, that Lady Mary Wortley Montague learned the value of variolous inoculation, and that the Spaniard acquired a knowledge of sarsaparilla and cinchona. The beaten path of a profession seems, as it were, to prevent the growth of the flowers of discovery; and he who wishes to encounter novelties, must wander into unexplored wilds for them. Therefore is it that great discoveries are almost always made by those who are not regularly trained to the branch of science to which they belong. Thus, Watt was not a steam-engine maker, Arkwright was not a machinist, Fulton a mechanician, nor Franklin an electrician. Still less chance is there for professional discovery of the virtues of medicinal plants. No physician feels warranted to abandon known for unknown methods of cure, or to expose his patients to the doubtful risk of novel experiments. But in every district are to be found peculiar domestic remedies; in every place pretenders to the healing art explore the secrets of nature with a hand the bolder for its ignorance. They plough the

sea of discovery with no dread of rocks and shoals, of the presence of which they are unaware; whilst the tutored medical pilot wends his way with an instructed caution. For these reasons I would like to see the rural profession a little more awake to the popular belief of their districts, as to the virtues of the indigenous *flora*. There must be, in the countless plants of our prolific country, much unknown excellence, many important remedies, which can never be admitted to the shelves of the practitioner, unless our country physicians will pay more attention to this important field of research. Often small parcels of a vegetable remedy are sent to me, with loose accounts of their virtues. My invariable answer has been, try the articles yourselves; watch their effects, and carefully record the results. Then, when you have proved their excellence or want of virtue, publish your conclusions in a short, simple, non-conjectural paper, so as positively or negatively to set the questions at rest. He who kills a prejudice, adds to the facilities of the progress of discovery, scarcely less than he who brings to our knowledge an unknown medical auxiliary. In either case, your labour will not be lost to society; whilst the habit of observation, the keen cross-questioning of nature, and the correctness of cultivated judgment, will more than reward you for the time and labour you may give to the subject.

But you may find an impediment in the want of botanical knowledge, or of the chemical skill necessary to the evolution of the active principles, of whose powers you wish to make an estimate. These are impediments only to the indolent and incurious. A short manual of botany, an elementary work on chemistry, a few months of light and agreeable study, and a few amusing experiments, will enable you to examine the whole field of your *peculium*, and will also give you a reputation which cannot be confined to your neighbourhood, but which will resound in the halls of Germany, and brighten in the saloons of England.

Yes—well—but—there is the dignity—of the profession. You cannot, perhaps, admit that, on your special subject,

any uneducated person shall know what is to you unknown: and therefore you may do as has been done unfortunately a thousand times before,—take shelter in dogmatism, and despise, or pretend to despise, the knowledge which is unknown to you. That is just the spirit which has retarded the progress of medicine, until it lags, as a science, behind every other. Never, therefore, neglect the hints which come to you from even the most insignificant sources, and remember that the examination even of an error, if done in a proper spirit, carries with it an ample compensation. Suppose that, after a hundred, nay, a thousand failures, you should alight, as you are sure to do, upon a valuable discovery, will you not offer to mankind a priceless gift? No matter how small the discovery: if it is to alleviate pain, or to hasten recovery, in the slightest known disorder, it is offered to the thousand millions now on the face of the earth, and to the countless thousands of millions who shall, in all future time, enjoy the benefit of the discovery, and bless the discoverer.

I have often mused upon the famous words of the grand old Sydenham, who declared, in a burst of generous enthusiasm, "I would rather be the discoverer of the slightest remedy for the least of diseases, than accept the renown of the mightiest of warriors!" He pursued the idea no farther; but, no doubt, he thought of the indefinitely great expansion in space and time of that least of discoveries, until it grew to an inconceivably grand edifice of usefulness and renown. If such be the true value of any medical truth, and if such truths are to be sought most commonly from unprofessional sources, I believe that the truest dignity will consist in being the pupil even of a peasant or a quack. When Jenner listened to the prattle of a milkmaid, in the shop of his country teacher of medicine, he did not despise the hint as to the "cowpock," as she termed it, because *she* was ignorant, and perhaps stupid, and because *he* was learned and *dignified*. Had his been a common spirit, had his been an inadvertent or indolent character, instead of now looking upon this audience of most agreeable countenances, I should

see before me a large portion of you deformed with unsightly scars, or blotched with unseemly furrows. Nay, most of you would not be here at all, since the ravages of small-pox would have immensely retarded the growth of population. Remember, therefore, gentlemen, that very many of you owe the precious liberty, the enlightened philosophy, and the personal beauty which you now enjoy, to the gossip of a country girl, and the reaction of a grand and humble spirit upon it. Dignity, indeed! Wherever and whenever was dignity hurt by doing, or endeavouring to do good? The Maker of the universe condescended to create the spider and the worm: the Master of our refined religion spat upon common clay, to mould it into a remedy for the sightless eye of a beggar; and Jenner, whose renown now fills the civilized universe, laboured for twenty years against ignorance, malice, and presumption, to force his fellow-creatures to receive as an inestimable truth the careless hint of a peasant girl. Dignity! How often it is to be interpreted, pride and indolence.

Within a few weeks, I visited a country practitioner, whose beautiful residence lies not many miles from the place in which I now address you. I found him in an octagonal library, surrounded not only by almost every accredited medical treatise, but encompassed by works of general science and elegant literature. His garden contained the rarest flowers, and his grounds the most beautiful shrubs. The tall trees, most of which he had himself planted, were stately and rare. A florist, an arborist, a geologist, and a farmer, he was the centre of the scientific interest of his locality, and the stimulant of the agriculture of his neighbourhood. Through him passed into useful currency much of the valuable knowledge of progressive truth, and to his munificent hand might be traced many a rare flower, many a valuable shrub or tree, and many a profitable cereal novelty. In *manner* he was very dignified, in conduct most polite and humane, in example faultlessly moral. A most finished gentleman, the companion of the most exalted and

refined, he was yet of easy access to the poor and the humble, who ever found in him a ready listener and a kind and skilful adviser—nay, more, a generous assister. With all these high qualities, he was the steady medical attendant, for many years, of nearly every one in his neighbourhood, and he passed from the stately edifice of the wealthy and educated, whom he delighted and improved, to the hovel of the poor and the ignorant, whom he healed, and fed, and instructed. He is now, through the disability of age and health, unable to continue his once ceaseless round of liberal study and generous action: but the old trunk yet shows what the tree has been. Its branches are dead, its leaves have fallen, and its scathed stem shows the marks of time and the wear of the elements; but, like the trysting tree of a Scottish village, it is yet a sacred resort. The birds no longer swing carolling upon its lithe tracery, the herds rejoice no more in the cool depth of its refreshing shadows, and youth and manhood no longer repair to it in the season of festivity. But who forgets it in passing? What winter evening brings not back its name and its memory to the hearts and the hearths of the people of Germantown, who may differ about almost everything else, but who have but one concurrent suffrage for their noble and dignified Betton?

At a greater distance from Philadelphia, resides the president of the Bank of Chester County, an active and enlightened politician, and an able and accomplished physician. At the period when youth and health enabled him to endure the fatigues of an extensive practice, and he was engaged almost day and night in the pursuit of his laborious profession, he kept ceaselessly a faithful analytical register of the weather, reported skilfully the geology of Westchester, and made a complete catalogue of the vegetation of his district. The *Flora Cestrensis* is lauded and quoted by every American botanist, and the name of Darlington, its distinguished author, is not unknown to the science even of Europe. He delights, too, in rescuing from oblivion the choice minds of his state and country, and luxuriates in the development of knowledge, under extraordinary difficulties.

His Memoir of John Bartram and Humphry Marshall is a charming book; and every lover of his country must peruse with a proud interest, the introductory essay on the Progress of Botany in North America, as illustrated in the lives of these pioneers of its beautiful flora.

I should delight to do public homage to many other brilliant examples of the virtues I am now celebrating, but the limits of an introductory, and the themes yet to be treated, forbid the pleasing duty. I must, therefore, content myself with merely naming the eminent discoveries and able lectures of Mettauer of Prince Edward, a name of which Virginia is justly proud. I may, also, allude to the able writings, and most useful statistics, of the industrious Cartwright, of Natchez, and point to the fine experiments of Graaf on milk-sickness, the able, and very short, paper of Parry, of Indiana, on congestive fever, and the clear and simple reports of Jonathan Clark, on puerperal etheration, as fine examples of the good use which a rural practitioner may make of his peculiar position.

But I should be faithless to the station which I hold, as a public teacher, were I to overlook the low character of many of the papers published in the American journals. They are usually very faulty in language, defective in structure, and utterly devoid of useful information. I have often felt saddened, as I rose from the perusal of our journals, at the recollection of the sad trash by which they are disfigured. Many of the writers in them appear to think that just to be seen in print, is to be distinguished. James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, was my acquaintance and friend. Walking with him one day, in the streets of Edinburgh, the mail coach rattled past us, whilst the guard, in a bright scarlet overcoat, was blowing a horn. "How I envy that fellow!" said he. "I never see the guard, but I wish to be up there, sounding my horn, and getting everybody to look at me." "But for what good, would they look at you?" said I. "Ah!" said he, "that is true; you may call it, as it is, a weakness; but I have a sort of instinctive longing to make a thundering

noise, and get all the world to look at me." Now, gentlemen, I trust that there is not a man among you who is infected with the love of mere notoriety, whilst I fondly believe, that each of you cherishes the hope of being usefully known to the world; that you mean to blow your horn loudly; not to attract notice by the mere noise you make, but to announce important truths, or to advise of impending dangers. The writers in our journals seem often to mistake the objects of these useful vehicles of knowledge, and greatly undervalue the taste and sense of their readers. Yet the worst of these writers could tell us something which we would be glad to know, and, with a very little attention to style, might tell it without offending our taste. What we want to know are phenomena, unusual phenomena, if single, but, the most common phenomena, if a totality can be reached. Now, phenomena become facts only when philosophically understood. The want of this distinction is a constant stumbling-block in the way of inexperienced writers, who advance opinions so as to obscure events, and, indulge in arguments, when we desire only descriptions. They are competent judges of phenomena, they are scarcely posted up to the philosophy which may make them facts. Yet they despise the attainable and great honour of being exact observers and faithful recorders, and aim at the, to them, impossible credit of expounders. Grasping thus at the theoretic shadow, they lose the practical substance. In the papers to which I allude, you are annoyed by the ceaseless repetition of such unmeaning phrases as these—emulging the liver, bringing down the bile, evacuating the morbific agent, neutralizing the malaria, marsh exhalations, putrid emanations, nervous irritability, idio and koino miasmata, septic evolutions, antiseptic defences. Young writers, and incompetent old ones, get up a notion, a mere notion, and found upon it a long dissertation, in which there is often no substance whatever, no new facts, and no useful marshalling of old ones. These papers usually begin with "I think," or "I am of opinion," and end by showing that the writers have

not thought, and have no opinion; for that which they assert, is often so intangible and unreal, as to be insusceptible of an expression distinct enough to convey an opinion.

At present, besides the introduction of new remedies for old diseases, or the novel application of old medicines, the profession most desires to know the mode of propagation, and the laws of the progression of epidemic diseases, the relation of climate and weather to health, the influence upon the salubrity of limited districts, by changes in their surface, by accident or design, as by torrents, or mill-dams, or drains; by canals or railroads; by the planting of trees, or the clearing away of woods. The more limited the district, the more easily can these things be examined and reported. In a great city, the changes by which health is affected, are too slow to be appreciable, and only by a long observation, and complicated statistics, can sound knowledge be reached. But in the country, and especially in our new country, changes are rapid and complete, and their consequents and coincidents are easily noticed. A new mill-dam, therefore, should never be built without a register of the weather, and a record of the local diseases which are its accompaniment. Yet, if the physician have not kept *previously* such a record and register, he has no points for comparison, and the exact effect of the change cannot be estimated. Knowledge, on this all-important subject, is, therefore, very imperfect. A number of such reports, in various places and different years, accompanied by a geological description, would enable some industrious compiler to announce a splendid generality. Were I placed now, in the beginning of a medical life, in a rural district, I would resolve to work out my share of this problem, by keeping a register of the dew point, the temperature and the rain—a meteorological table—I would, also, record the age, sex, and fate of every patient, together with the disease, and a general statement of its treatment. I would watch the changes of the superficial condition of the district, record their date, and carefully mark the beginning and progress of hygienic alterations, and report these things, not opinionatively, but narratively and statistically. The two

sets of changes may be connected as cause and effect, or they may be mere coincidents. That can be finally known, only by multiplied observations, made by many persons, in many places, and at various periods. To effect this grand object, I now ask you, gentlemen, to work together, even for a lifetime, and, if you consent, the present generation will see completed, what, up to this time, the whole human race has scarcely begun.

Again, in a large city, the intrusion of an epidemic, or the outbreak of an endemic, cannot be observed, without the impracticable concurrence of the action of all its physicians. But in very rural districts, where one man may know of every event of importance, the approach of such maladies may be seen and watched, until all the phenomena of their progress have been noted. This precious totality, however limited, is still a totality, and the manner of introduction, the character of the course, the mortality, and the effects of treatment, are in such circumstances of inestimable value. Now, gentlemen, to do all this, may at first sight seem to exact too much time and labour; but I think half an hour a day would enable you to effect all that I ask for, and give you a renown such as, without it, few of you can hope to reach. But besides this, you will have the high reward, which important duty, faithfully executed, ever confers, in the approval of your own conscience, and, the approbation of HIM who gave you your faculties and opportunities for such high uses.

In any place to which you may repair, live many people, interesting to you as members of your common society, and valuable as affording to you the means of exercising your skill and obtaining your independence. They will be of course some rich, some poor, and some there will be who can be said to belong to neither class, as they have perhaps a mere competency, the result of previous or present labour and economy. Whilst your professional charges should be such as to enable you to live and move in the very first circle of your place, I need scarcely ask you to take care not to lean too hardly upon the means of subsistence of the poor; you will go further, and sometimes screen from the sad

hardships of his sickness, the poor man, by giving to him a little of that which you have justly earned in the service of the affluent. In this way you may make the crumbs from the table of *Dives* fall into the basket of *Lazarus*.

I have melancholy cause to remember the fate of one noble member of the rural profession; who was the delight of the rich, and the idol of the poor. Ever ready to fly at the call of suffering, he preferred the poor man's summons; and used to say that the wealthy man could better afford to be long sick, than he whose bread depended upon his health, and who always suffered the double burden of want and sickness. This good man fell ill of a malignant tertian, and whilst sick, was summoned to the aid of a poor man at a considerable distance. His friends and family opposed his desire to go out, but he replied that no other person was likely to go to the poor man's aid. "Were he rich, I would not," said he, "run the unnecessary risk, because he could purchase aid from a distance, but *who will listen to the remote cry of the poor man's agony!*" He went, was seized with rigors in the woods, laid himself upon the autumn leaves, and was finally carried home to die, the victim of a generous principle. No one, gentlemen, suffered a more severe loss than I, by the death of that man, but not for worlds would I obliterate the act and the example. Every one dies sooner or later, but how few die so sublimely. "Oh that *I* may live the life of the righteous, and that my latter end may be as his."—Gentlemen, when the warrior falls "with his back to the field and his feet to the foe," the world forgets, in the courage and the fate, the dread trade of destruction, of which he was the victim; and Heaven frowns, whilst man applauds. When the good physician dies thus, the world may not praise him, but God approves, and they who most mourn his loss, glory in the memory of his virtues and his self-denial.—*Our sentiment may sorrow, but our intelligence rejoices.*

The more remote the place of residence of a physician, the more will the little community in which he lives depend upon him, not only for professional advice, but for scientific

knowledge and liberal information. He is, perhaps, in such a case, the only person in the district who has had the opportunity of holding prolonged communication with the great world, and of learning from it much that it imports his neighbours to know. This is of itself a wondrous inducement for you, gentlemen, to reap the full benefit of your present opportunity, not only in medicine, but in science and letters. The very character of your future home may depend, in no small degree, upon the use you may now make of your invaluable privileges; for, as the general repute of the country leans much upon the medical profession, so often does the virtue and the intelligence of a community but reflect these qualities from the good physician, who is at once the teacher and the exemplar.

Another inducement to make the most of your present opportunities, lies in the probability that you will, in due course of time, become the instructers of other students. The responsibility you must then incur is of the greatest magnitude, as it embraces an important present, and relates to an extended future. If you should neglect the ample means of acquiring knowledge here, where the hope of a degree, and the ignominy of a rejection, stimulate you to exertion, how little expectation can be entertained of a better use of your time, under less pressing inducements! He who goes ignorant from college, will remain ignorant for life, despite the terrors of conscience and the incentives of duty. He who does less than his task here, will never come up to it elsewhere.

The great medical association of the United States, struck with the defects of the present system of medical education, has endeavoured to correct them at the gates of the college-life. But many of my most judicious friends think, that when a student reaches that point, with all his imperfections on his head, he is rather a hopeless case for academical correction. A college may give you the philosophy of medicine: it may show you the curiously diversified cases of a "clinic," and discourse most learnedly upon them; yet in large masses, direct personal access to patients, the putting

the finger on the pulse, the application of the stethoscope to the chest, would be impossible. If, then, such things are not taught by the rural preceptor, they will not be learned until, at the expense of his patients, the medical novice acquires a knowledge of these interesting details. But the private preceptor should be able not only to show the phenomena of the sick room; he ought to be able to convert them, by proper explanation, into facts, and thus lead his pupils, by an easy path, up to the gates of the grand temple of science. Are you willing, gentlemen, by neglecting the fine materials to be placed before you here, to incapacitate yourselves for the greatest object of a proper ambition, the transmission of sound knowledge to the times yet to come? The indefinite multiplication of truth and error, by transmission and diffusion, makes the preceptor's duty the most important part of a physician's functions.

You can scarcely expect to place yourselves where you will not have professional neighbours and rivals. Even in the most remote stations, candidates for public favour will be found, whose hostility seems usually to be in inverse proportion to their numbers. Where only two physicians occupy a place, they are seldom friends, often enemies. Yet a dispassionate observer may see that both reputation and interest would be promoted by a friendly intercourse with one another. In sickness, in absence, many kind reciprocities might be of the greatest value, *whilst no man has ever traced a benefit to an animosity.* When you praise a rival, and he extols you, both are raised in public esteem; for to praise a rival is itself a pleasing act, whilst the favourable testimony receives a ready acceptance. But traducement degrades the author of it, and entails on him the disbelief which ever attends on the censure of a rival, for it is ascribed to malice and interest.

If, then, at your entrance upon active duty, you discover, through fear of you, the jealousy and even petty slander of an older settler, bear with it, at least for a while; seem not to hear of it, and endeavour, if he be entitled to respect, to show him that you will not be converted into an adversary.

One or two good words from you will soften his asperity, by assuaging his fears; and soon you may convert an obstructive into a promotive, and find a friend where it is easy to make an enemy. In most of medical rivalries, both parties are to blame, and by a kind of judicial justice, both are made to suffer. One kind, judicious physician in a place, often converts discord into harmony. To your young and generous trust, I therefore confide the harmony of the profession, in every part of the Union. As you will doubtless go forth, examples of virtue and learning, I trust you will excel also all preceding classes, in carrying with you, wherever you go, a love of professional honour, and a desire for professional harmony.

I must, gentlemen, for want of time, postpone to another season, much, that on this interesting subject, might be profitably said. That which I have said, may make a favourable impression on *some* of you; I hope, on *many* of you. If I shall persuade even a few to take the course and practise upon the precepts I now present to you, I shall feel indeed most happy in the prospect of brighter times for our profession and our country. In no part of the world, are rural districts better fitted than in ours, for the kind of examination to which, I would have them subjected. Nowhere are they more limited in population, and rapid in transitions. I fully expect therefore to learn that some members of this class, have found in the most remote regions, a fame, which a Hunter might covet, or a Sydenham desire. Be assured, my young friends, that your fame will be dear to us, and that when you begin to lift your light above the common horizon, the teachers of the Jefferson College, will be among the first to welcome its rising, and to direct the admiring attention of the world to its bright pathway in the sky.

May you and we therefore look back joyously, to this first meeting of 1849, and as we, in after years, contemplate the rich fruits of this auspicious session, exclaim, "It has been interesting beyond example."